

# Chronic Absence: An Essential Tool for Planning and Evaluation of Community Schools

**CAS Community Schools Practicum 2011**  
**Every School a Community School: Focus on Results**  
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# Finding out About You

- *What is your role?*
- *What level of programming are you focused upon?*
- *What kind of community do you work in?*



# Desired outcomes

- 1) Convey the value of chronic absence for community schools
- 2) Share ideas and strategies that you can use to make the case
- 3) Allow you to discuss how these concepts apply to your own work

# Community Schools Approach Is Key To Reducing Chronic Absence

*Schools need insights, assets,  
commitment of students, parents and  
community agencies to understand and  
address barriers to student attendance  
and create caring, engaging  
environments where students want to be  
in class, every day.*

# Chronic Absence Is Critical Tool for Community Schools

Consider using it as:

*A unifying, common goal*

*Effective tool for resource allocation*

*Easy to understand measure of progress  
and success*



# An Antidote to Drop-Out

*The 3 A School Success Framework*

**Attendance Every Day**

**Achievement Every Year**

**Attainment Over Time**



## Defining Key Terms

- ❑ **Average Daily Attendance:** The percentage of enrolled students who attend school each day.
- ❑ **Satisfactory Attendance:** Missing 5% or less of school in an academic year including all absences – excused, unexcused, suspensions, etc.
- ❑ **At-Risk of Chronic Absence:** Missing 5-10% of school in an academic year including all absences.
- ❑ **Chronic Absence:** Missing 10% or more of school in an academic year including all absences. (*Chang & Romero 2008*)
- ❑ **Severe Chronic Absence:** Missing 20% or more days of school per year – approximately two months of school including all absences. (*Johns Hopkins University, Everyone Graduates Center*)
- ❑ **Truancy:** Typically refers *only* to unexcused absences and is defined by each state although NY does not have a state policy requiring action based upon a specified number of unexcused absences.



## When 90% Doesn't Earn an "A"

*Students Who Miss More Than 10% Of School Are At Grave Risk*



**Chronic Absence**  
(=>10% absence)

**Warning Signs**  
(<10% but >5% absence)

**Satisfactory Attendance**  
(=<5% absence)

**Emergency:** =>20% absence





# Myths to Dispel

**MYTH 1:**  
Attendance in Kindergarten doesn't really matter for academic success.

**MYTH 2:**  
Missing school isn't a big problem until middle or high school.

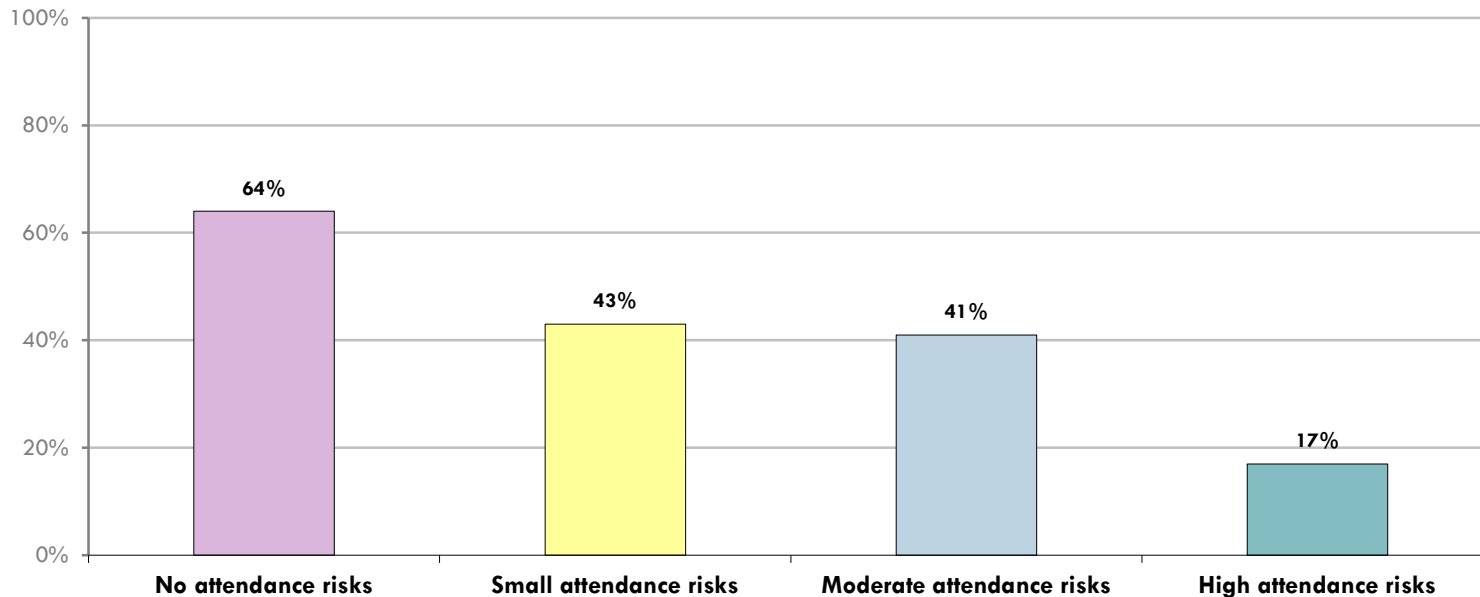
**MYTH 3:**  
Most educators monitor chronic absence.

**MYTH 4:**  
Since attendance is a family responsibility, we cannot do anything to address chronic absence.



# Students Chronically Absent in Kindergarten & 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Much Less Likely to Read Proficiently in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

Percent Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA Based on Attendance in Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> Grade



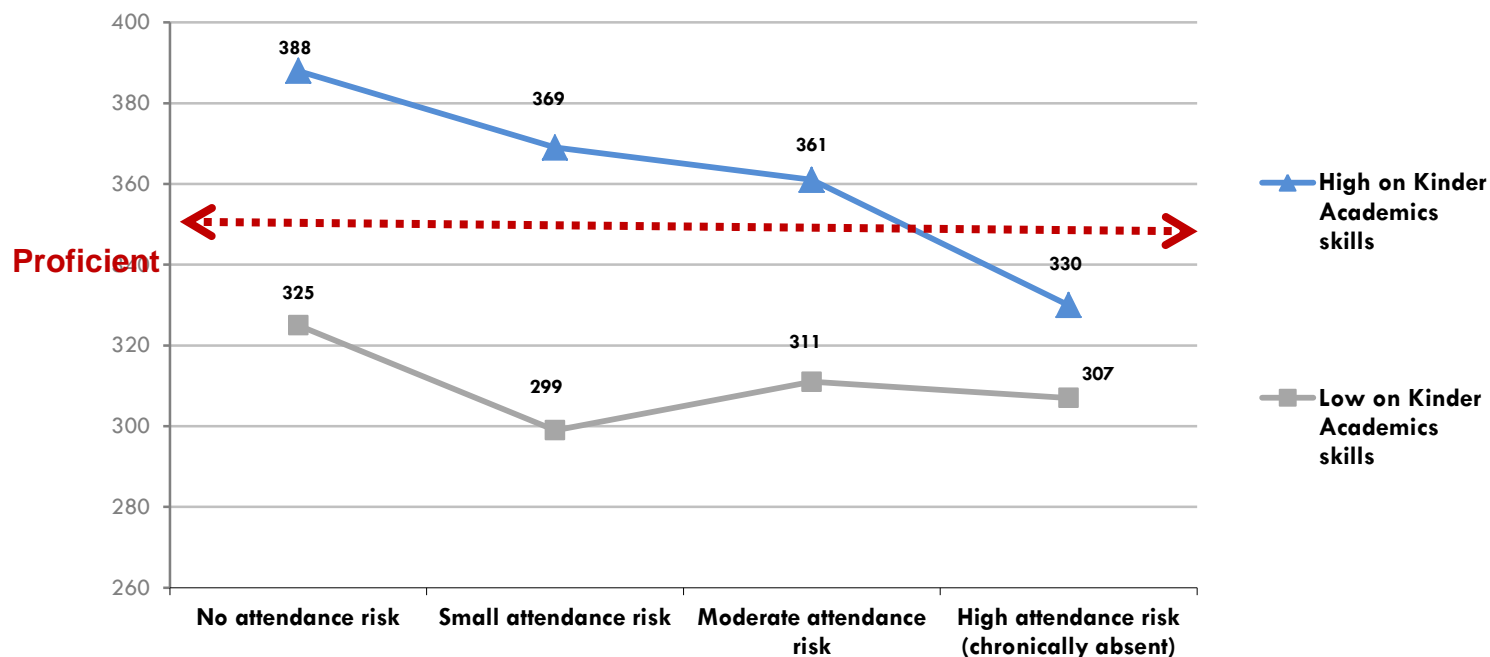
No risk	Missed less than 5% of school in K & 1 <sup>st</sup> t
Small risk	Missed 5-9% of days in both K & 1 <sup>st</sup> t
Moderate risk	5-9% of days absent in 1 year & 10 % in 1 year
High risk	Missed 10% or more in K & 1 <sup>st</sup>

Source: Applied Survey Research & Attendance Works (April 2011)



# School Readiness & Early Attendance Are Critical to Early School Success

**3<sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA Test Scores By Attendance and School Readiness Level**



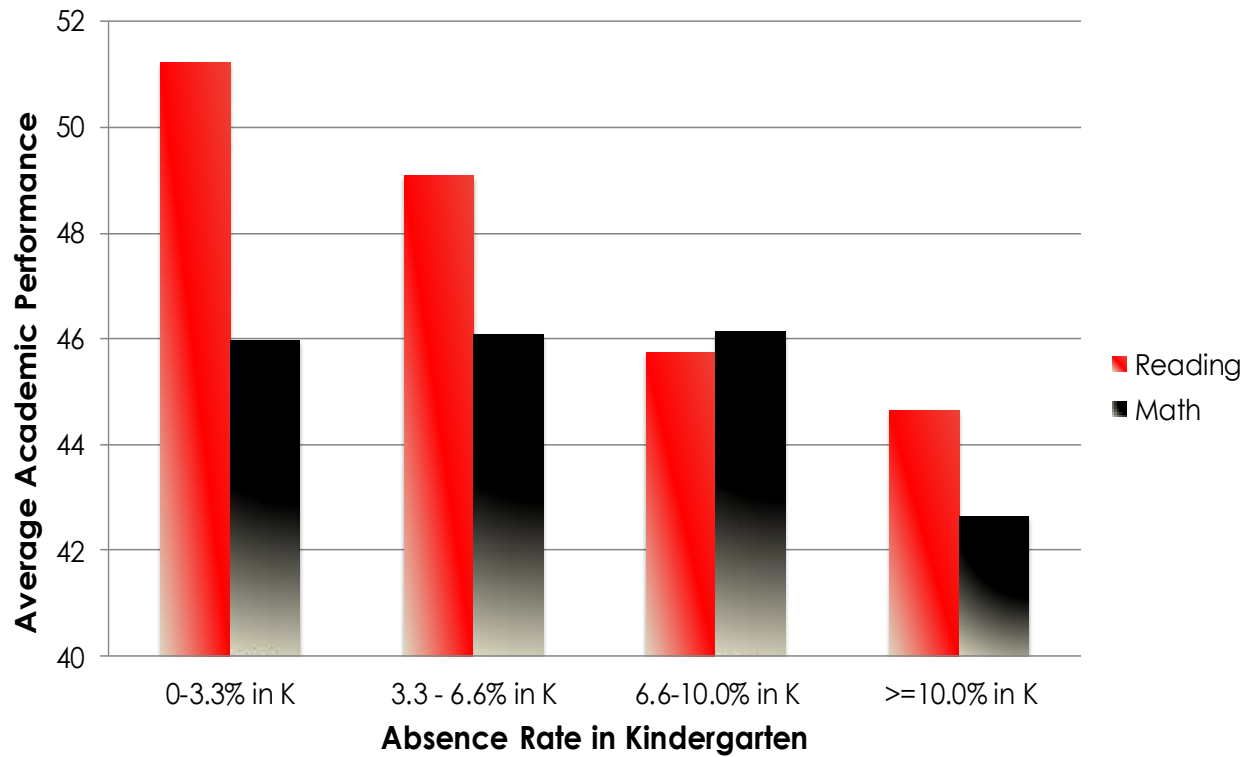
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# The Long-term impact of Chronic Kindergarten Absence Is Most Troubling for Poor Children

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Math and Reading Performance By K Attendance



Source: ECLS-K data analyzed by National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)  
Note: Average academic performance reflects results of direct cognitive assessments conducted for ECLS-K.



# Chronic Absence is Especially Challenging for Low-Income Children

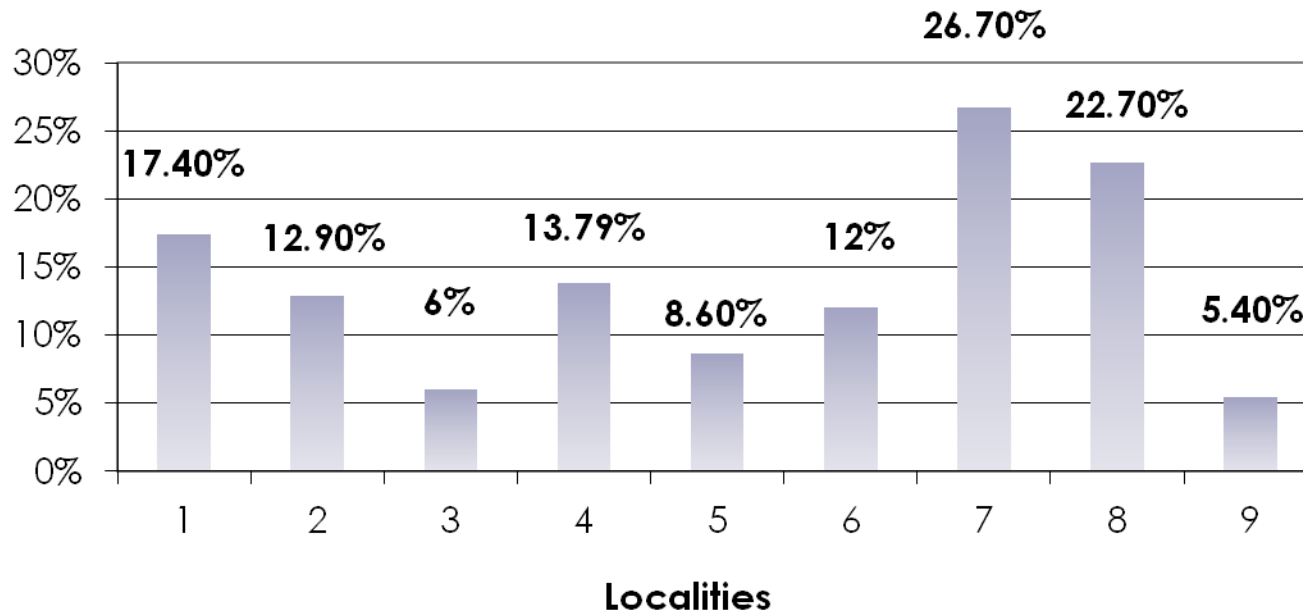
- ❑ Poor children are **4x** more likely to be chronically absent in K than their highest income peers.
  
- ❑ Children in poverty are more likely to lack basic health and safety supports that ensure a child is more likely to get to school. They often face:
  - **Unstable Housing**
  - **Limited Access to Health Care**
  - **Poor Transportation**
  - **Inadequate Food and Clothing**
  - **Lack of Safe Paths to School Due to Neighborhood Violence**
  - **Chaotic Schools with Poor Quality Programs, etc.**

(Romero & Lee, 2007)



# Chronic Early Absence Can Reach High Levels

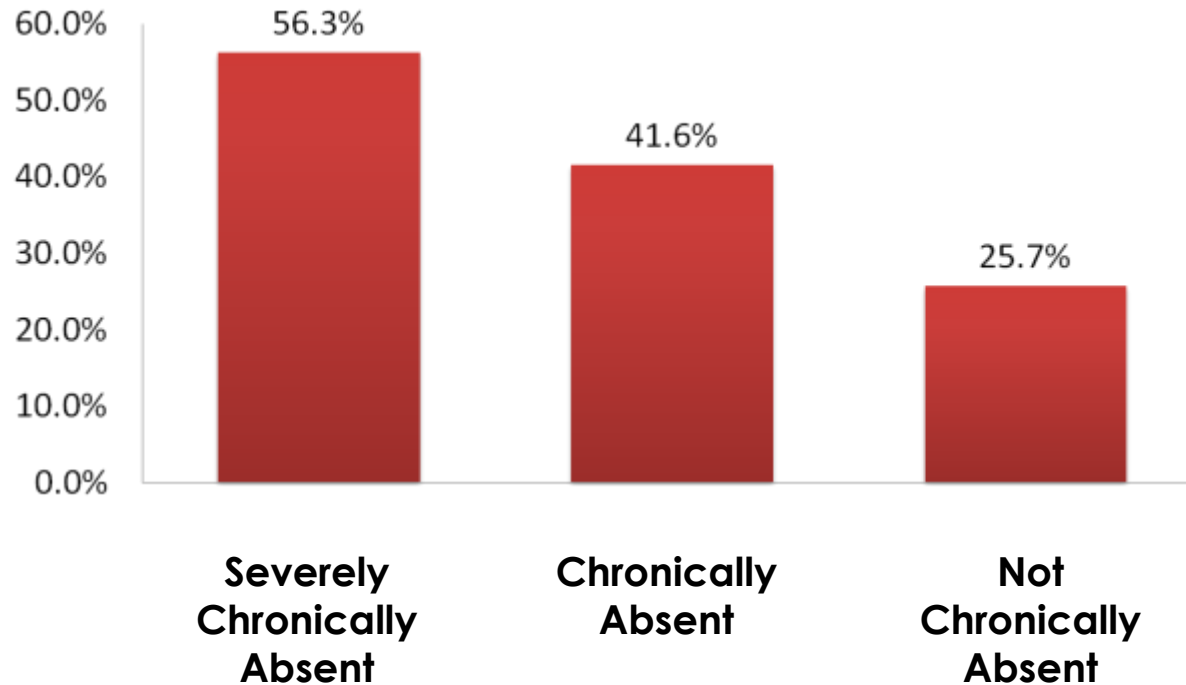
Nationally, 1 out of 10 Kindergartners & 1st Graders are Chronically Absent. Levels Can be Higher Locally.





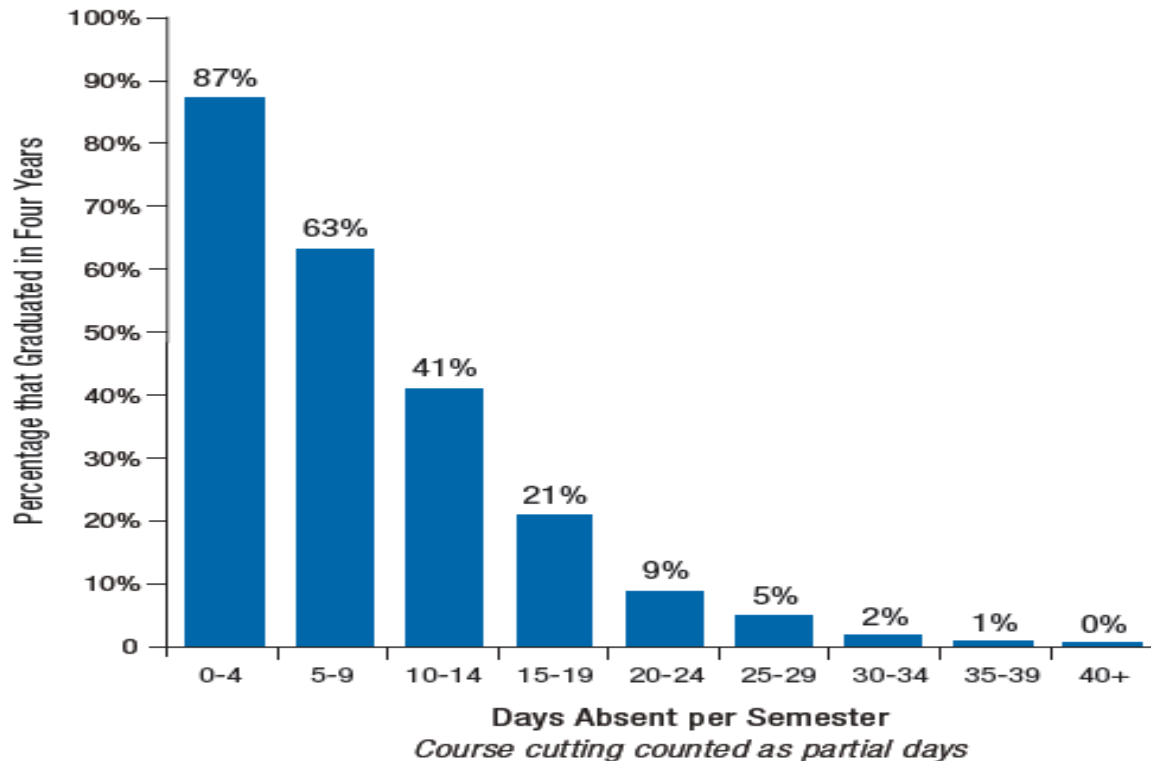
# Chronically Absent 6th Graders Have Lower Graduation Rates

Dropout Rates by Sixth Grade Attendance  
(Baltimore City Public Schools, 1990-2000 Sixth Grade Cohort)





# 9th Grade Attendance Predicts Graduation for Students of All Economic Backgrounds



Note: This Chicago study found attendance was a stronger graduation predictor than 8th grade test scores.

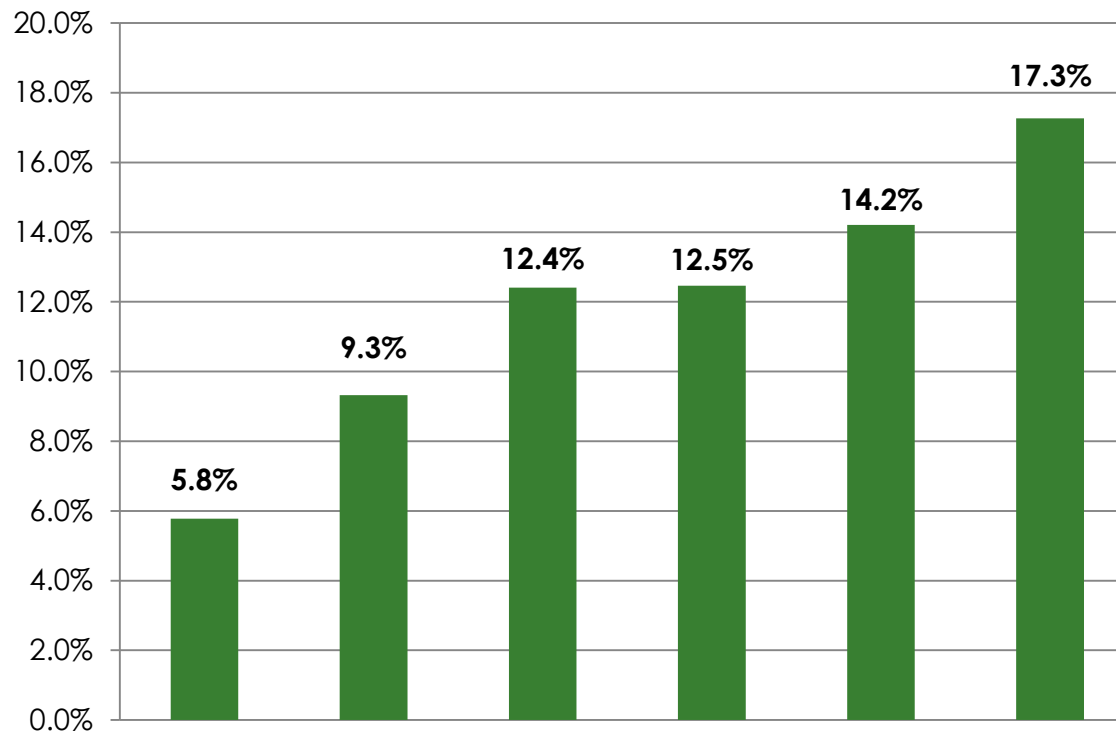




# Moving into Action Requires Knowing If Chronic Absence is a Problem

***Most Schools Only Track Average Daily Attendance and Truancy. Both Can Mask Chronic Absence.***

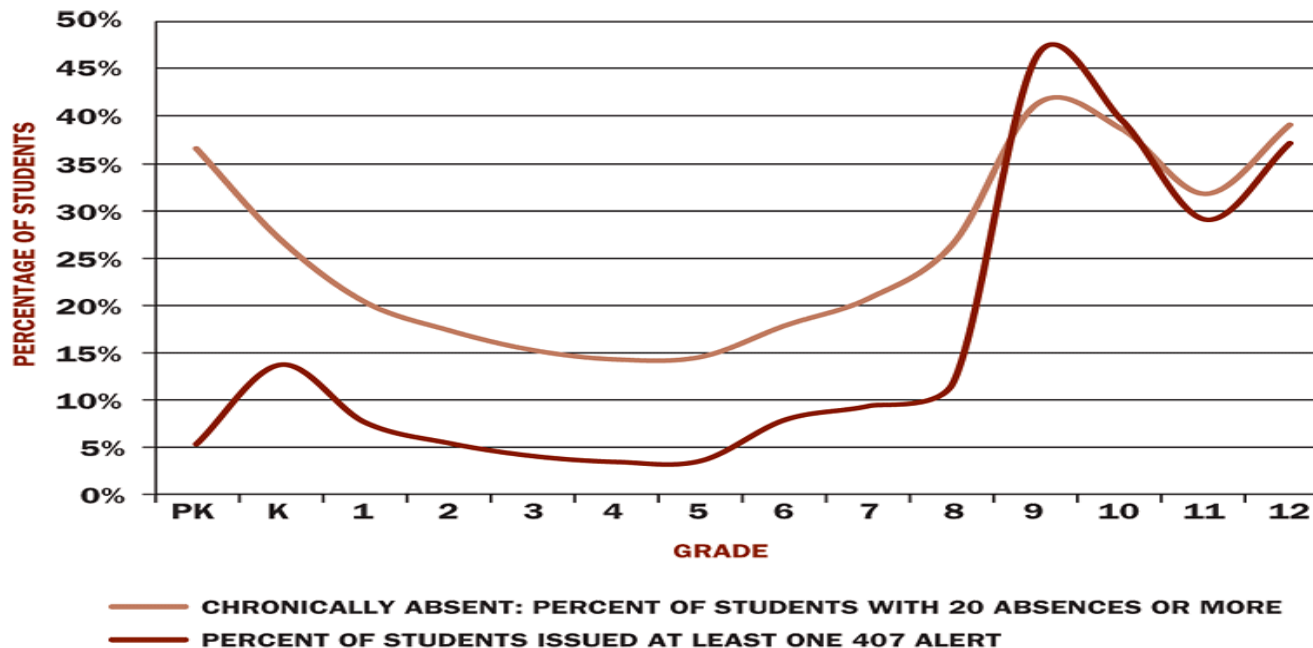
**Variation in Chronic Absence for Schools with 95% ADA in Oakland, CA**





# Sporadic — Not Just Consecutive — Absences Matter

New York City Schools



A 407 alert is issued when student misses 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a 40 day period. It misses more sporadic absence.  
1 out of 5 elementary school children were chronically absent.



## **Data Usually Exists But Is Not Being Used Effectively**

- ☐ In most schools, teachers take roll every day.
- ☐ In most districts, attendance for each student is recorded electronically.
- ☐ Chronic absence is, however, typically not calculated and monitored even though the data exists.
- ☐ 5 states (CA, NY, ILL, NJ, CO) do not even have attendance in their longitudinal student databases although most districts do.



## Data is Needed for Identifying Programmatic Solutions

- ❑ Chronic absence data (as well as other attendance measures) should be examined by classroom, grade, school, neighborhood or sub-population.
- ❑ If chronic absence is unusually high for a particular group of students, explore what might be common issues (unreliable transportation, community violence, asthma and other chronic diseases, poor access to health care, unnecessary suspension for non-violent offenses, lack of engaging curriculum, child care or afterschool programming, foreclosures, etc.)
- ❑ If chronic absence is unusually low for a high risk population, find out what they are doing that works.



# Variation Helps Identify Good Practice and Need for Intervention

## Chronic Absence Levels Among Oakland Public Schools

	Elementary	Middle	High School
# Schools with 0%-5% Chronic Absence	9	0	0
# Schools with 5.1%-10% Chronic Absence	17	4	1
# Schools with 10.1%-20% Chronic Absence	25	8	6
# Schools with >20.1% Chronic Absence	9	4	9
Total No. Schools	60	16	16
Highest % of Chronic Absence	31.5%	32.8%	42.1%
Lowest % of Chronic Absence	0.3%	6.9%	7.9%
Median	12.7%	14.9%	21.0%
Mean	11.9%	15.6%	22.4%



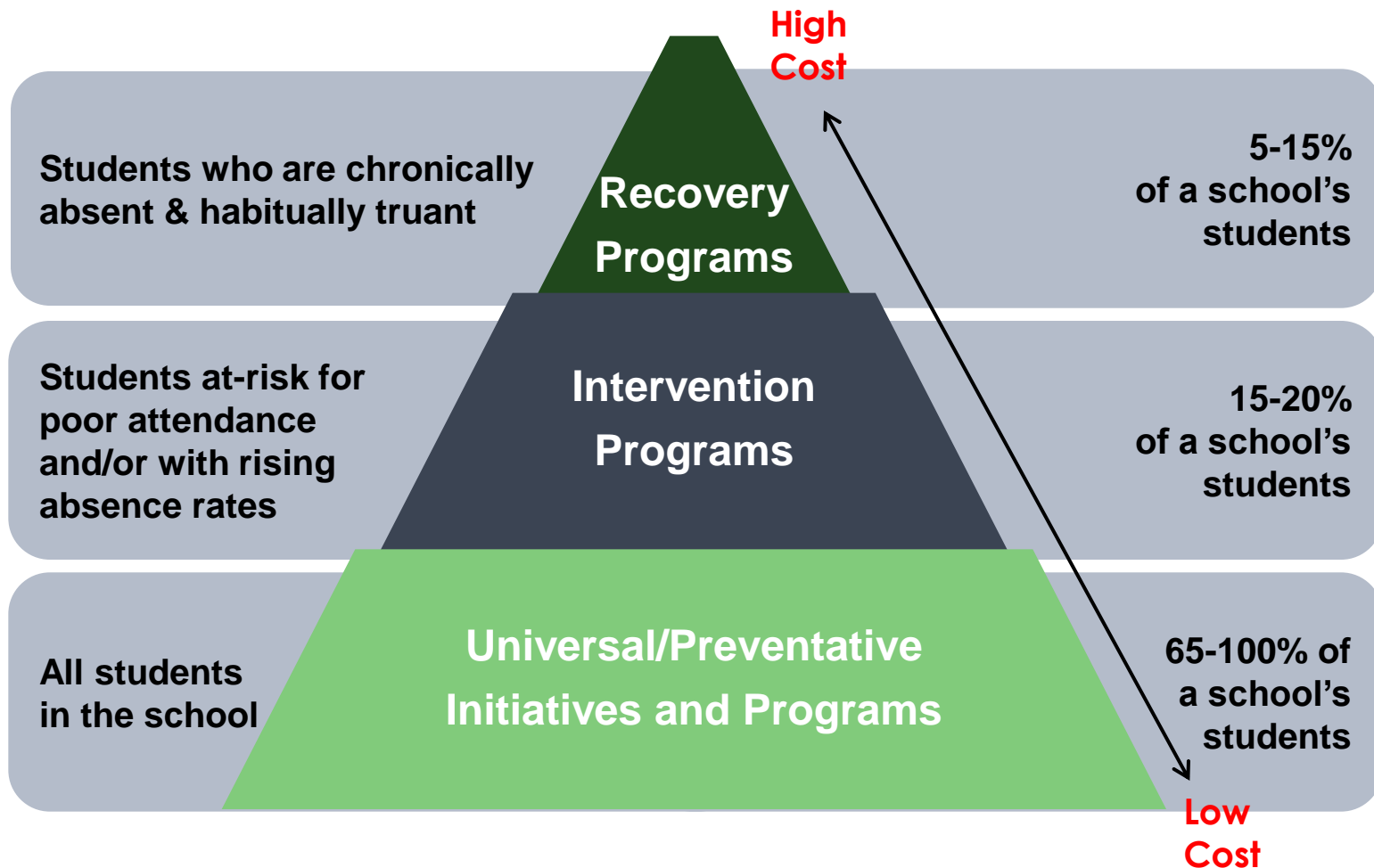
# **Schools + Communities CAN Make a Difference**

## **Characteristics of Successful Attendance Initiatives**

- ❑ Partner with community agencies to help families carry out their responsibility to get children to school.
- ❑ Make attendance a priority, set targets and monitor progress over time.
- ❑ Engage parents and students in identifying and addressing school, family, and community issues that contribute to chronic absence.
- ❑ Clearly communicate expectations for attendance to students and families.
- ❑ Begin early, ideally in Pre-K.
- ❑ Combine targeted interventions with universal strategies that nurture an engaged learning environment, build a culture of attendance and ensure physical health and safety at school.
- ❑ Offer positive supports before punitive action.



# Increased Attendance Involves a 3-Tiered Approach that Fits with Most Reform Efforts





# Improving Attendance Takes an Cross-Disciplinary Approach

## Universal Attendance Supports

- ☐ Safe and supportive school environment (PBIS)
- ☐ Inviting and engaging classroom environment
- ☐ Intentional family involvement and participation
- ☐ On-going attention to attendance data
- ☐ Rapid parent contact for unexplained absences
- ☐ Recognition for good and improved attendance
- ☐ Collaboration with afterschool programs and early childhood programs to build a culture of attendance
- ☐ Increased access to school based health supports
- ☐ A school plan and budget that reflects high attendance priorities



## Individual Assessments and Intervention

- ☐ Refer chronically absent/ truant students for intervention (student support teams)
- ☐ Identify and remove barriers
- ☐ Provide on-going support

## Recovery Strategies

- ☐ Interagency Staffing
- ☐ Case management and wrap-around services
- ☐ Referral as last resort for court -based intervention





# Considerations for Younger Children

- ❑ Many parents may not be aware that attendance in pre-K & K matters.
- ❑ Young children's attendance is affected by what happens to parents. Multiple maternal and family risk factors increase chronic absence.
- ❑ Participation in formal child care is associated with lower chronic absence in kindergarten.
- ❑ Developing good on-time attendance habits begin in pre-K.
- ❑ Poor health was associated with higher chronic absence for in K-3 for children from 200-300% of poverty.
- ❑ While attendance is more affected by family conditions, children's attitudes are a factor too.



## Considerations for Older Youth

- ❑ Attendance is more heavily influenced by the youth although family still matters.
- ❑ Older youth may miss school due to family responsibilities ( e.g. caring for siblings or ill parent, holding a job).
- ❑ Mental health, teen pregnancy, chronic conditions, and dental disease are top health concerns that affect attendance
- ❑ Safety issues (In-school and community) play even greater role.
- ❑ Students miss school due to suspensions for non-violent behaviors.
- ❑ Students become discouraged as they fall behind in credits and graduation feels increasingly unattainable.
- ❑ Direct and meaningful engagement of youth in the classroom and activities on campus even more essential.



# What Can Community Schools Do?

1. Adopt reduction of chronic absence as a shared priority with schools and districts.
2. Use chronic absence to determine where community schools are located.
3. Educate families and students about the importance of attendance and helping each other get to school.(See flyers)
4. Help establish or strengthen school-wide attendance incentive programs. (See incentive guidance.)



## What Can Community Schools Do?

5. Help reach out to chronically absence students and their families.
6. Help establish school attendance teams and serve as a member.
7. Help identify common barriers to getting to school and effective interventions.  
(See handout)
8. Advocate for schools to track, monitor and share information with community partners about attendance and chronic absence.



# Discussion

## In groups of 3:

- Does this resonate? What would you add or change?
- Are you currently engaged in any of these strategies? What has worked? What has been hard?
- What is 1 action you would take as a results of this workshop?